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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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TAGS: PGOV KWBG EAID PTER IS

SUBJECT: HAMAS APPOINTS "ACTING MAYOR" IN GAZA CITY,
ASSUMES CONTROL OF MUNICIPAL OFFICES

REF: A. 07 JERUSALEM 2522

¶B. 07 JERUSALEM 1794

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Gaza City Mayor Majid Abu Ramadan (Independent) told PolOff January 18 that Hamas has taken over administration of the Gaza City Municipality. He said Hamas is systematically replacing unit directors and appointed an "acting mayor" to freeze Abu Ramadan out of municipal operations. He said he remains director of water utility operations and Deputy Chairman of Gaza City's electrical company due to Hamas reluctance to alienate the World Bank and other donors. He said two Hamas rivals (the "acting mayor" aligned with Ismayil Haniyah and a director-general associated with Mahmud al-Zahar) are fighting for control of the Municipality. Abu Ramadan commented that Israeli military actions are strengthening Mahmud al-Zahar, and Gazans see al-Zahar as a hero after his son was killed in an Israeli operation. End summary.

Mayor Frozen Out of Gaza City Operations
Hamas Appoints "Acting Mayor"

¶2. (C) Gaza City Mayor Majid Abu Ramadan (Independent) told PolOff by phone January 18 that Hamas has taken over administration of the Gaza City Municipality and is systematically replacing office managers and unit directors with Hamas loyalists. Gaza City contacts say Hamas has not replaced Abu Ramadan as Mayor (and cannot legally do so), but has appointed Hamas member Sufian Abu Samra (a former Deputy Local Government Minister) as "acting mayor" and frozen Abu Ramadan out of municipal operations. Abu Ramadan said he still presides over water utility operations and remains Deputy Chairman of Gaza City's electrical company (the Municipality is the company's majority shareholder), since Chairman Ismayil Abu Shammala (also Governor of North Gaza) blocked Hamas move to replace the company's board of directors. He said Hamas will not replace him as director of the water utility out of fear that the World Bank and other donors will pull their funding if Hamas usurps control there.

Hamas Sub-factions Battle for Control

¶3. (C) Abu Ramadan said Imad Siyam, whom Hamas appointed as Director-General to take over Abu Ramadan's functions (Ref A), has attempted to resign twice and has frosty relations with the newly-appointed "acting mayor" Abu Samra. Siyam was appointed by former Hamas Minister of Local Government (MOLG) Muhammad al-Barghuthi, an associate of hard-line Hamas leader Mahmud al-Zahar, he said, while Abu Samra was appointed by former Hamas PM Ismayil Haniyah. The Municipality is divided

between the Hamas factions, he said, with most offices under Abu Samra's influence but some still under Siyam's authority.

Mayor: Israeli Attacks Strengthen Zahar

¶4. (C) Abu Ramadan commented that ongoing Israeli military actions in Gaza are strengthening Mahmud al-Zahar. He said many Gazans see him as a hero after his second son was killed in a January 15 Israeli operation. He said al-Zahar's followers are more aggressive and influential within Hamas.

WALLES